

September 20, 2019

Councilmembers Teresa Mosqueda & Sally Bagshaw, Co-Chairs
Seattle City Council Select Committee on Homelessness & Housing Affordability
600 4th Avenue, 2nd Floor
Seattle, WA 9104

Re: regional governance proposal

Dear Co-Chairs Mosqueda and Bagshaw,

Thank you for the opportunity to share concerns about the present proposal for regional governance of homeless services. As you know, my office works to create alternatives to the traditional criminal legal system that both effectively reduce crime and public order problems, and reduce use of jail and prosecution when possible. This is aligned with the conclusion of the One Table regional examination of homelessness in 2018 that criminal legal system involvement is a primary driver of long term homelessness.

We are concerned that that core observation of One Table is not borne out in the proposed regional governance structure for homeless services. It appears that the proposal has been developed in isolation from the prominent parallel conversation about “prolific offenders,” prompted by the Spring 2019 System Failure report commissioned by Seattle business associations. That report called attention to the fact that a significant number of individuals whose behavior poses serious issues for Seattle neighborhoods chronically cycle through the justice system with no apparent positive impact on their problematic behavior. All of the individuals in the case study presented by the report were homeless.

It should not escape notice that, parallel to the regional governance proposal, local leaders are casting about for strategies to address the “prolific offender” population. The recent modest initiatives announced by the Mayor and King County Executive will certainly fare poorly and have little impact in the absence of a coherent housing strategy for this group. Both business groups and homeless advocates and service providers have an interest in this gap being addressed. In general, this group does not score high enough on the Coordinated Entry screening tool to access homeless housing. Regional governance is an

opportunity to ensure that this issue will be centered and prioritized for resolution.

Yet, there is no sign that this is occurring. Absent from the regional governance structure is any channel for public safety and order issues to be factored into policy and investment choices. It is thus predictable that the large pool of public investment in homeless housing and services will continue to de-prioritize those who pose greatest issues for neighborhoods. This, in turn, will predictably cause frustrated neighborhoods and business to call for increased use of the criminal legal system to respond, which research and experience has shown to be counter-productive.

We urge in the strongest terms that the City of Seattle and King County clients insist on a channel into the governance process that will elevate public safety and public order considerations in the policy-setting and investment choices of the new regional body. Otherwise, we will miss the opportunity to use housing and homeless services to resolve our most pressing public order issues, which threatens the legitimacy of public officials' efforts on homelessness, a dynamic that is already in play and has caused considerable harm.

We also join with the observations of the Seattle-King County Coalition on Homelessness that the regional governance structure needs a formal channel to absorb the expertise of housing and service providers. Our region is fortunate to have some of the nation's foremost innovators in developing approaches to effective engagement with and care for highly marginalized people. Those experts need to be able to guide and influence policy in this area, and failing to provide a channel for that will weaken our region's approach.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lisa Dugaard', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lisa Dugaard
Director